

# Monu

*magazine on urbanism*

Branding the Generic City

Bern, Beverwijk, and the  
Representation of Cities

Claiming Space

I Like my Town

Music City, USA

Banal Urbanism

2nd Rate Urbanism  
in 1st Rate Urban Areas?

I ROTterdam

The Re-Creation of the Euro-  
pean City

Dumped in Almere - Interview  
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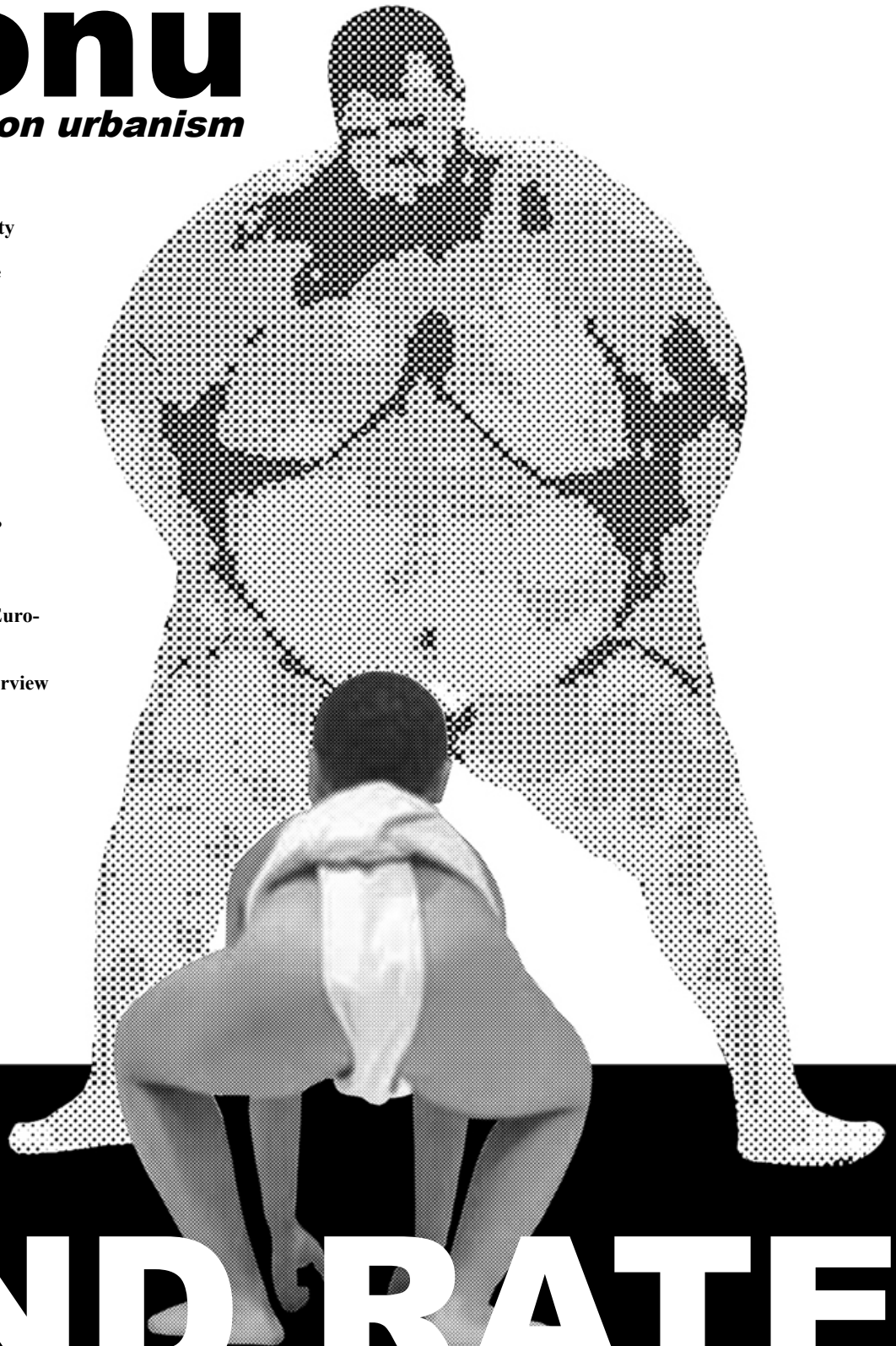
Little New York

Wholesale Urbanism

3rd Rate Guide to  
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What is Antiurbanism?

Bonifacio Global City.  
Ideal Manila.



**#07**

# 2ND RATE URBANISM

We produced this 2nd Rate Urbanism issue of monu during our stay at the open editorial office workshop that the German architecture magazine arch+ magazine organized as part of the 'magazines project' ([www.documenta12.de/magazines.html](http://www.documenta12.de/magazines.html)) at the documenta 12 in Kassel, Germany. It was a truly inspiring environment to be part of, in the midst of one of the biggest exhibits of contemporary art. A city bustling with events, artists and most importantly for us, the editors of dozens of other magazines from around the world. But Kassel was inspiring for a whole other reason as well. When there is no documenta, which is 94.5% of the time \*, the city is a prototypical 2nd rate city. And since we both know the city very well during its 'majority of the time' state (when there is no documenta) we found ourselves in the perfect location to produce this issue of monu. \*\*

Experiencing the sudden glamour during the 5.5% of the time when the city truly is on the map, it became clear how different the place is - how a single event can transform the atmosphere of a small town. An art show like the documenta would be an important event in a city like Berlin but it would not have the same transformative effect. One event at the documenta, a piece called 1001 Chinese, also represents this facet of 2nd rate urbanism in Kassel. The Artist Ai Weiwei invited 1001 Chinese people over the course of the documenta to come and stay in Kassel. With his migration event he visibly and tangibly affected the demographic composition of the city - something that would not have been possible in a metropolitan center.

It is this idea that if just one big thing can change the character and maybe the destiny of the city, then it may also fuel the redevelopment and re-engineering fantasies of many smaller places. If only a city can cultivate one big event that would lift it above all the others, all would be golden, so the thought goes. In it's most basic form this wish can degenerate to mere city branding - a phenomenon that in its US- incarnation is the topic of **Alfredo Andia's** piece "**Branding the Generic City**".

But as **Joost Meuwissen** points out in the introduction to "**Bern, Beverwijk, and the Representation of Cities**", the stories that these small cities have are just as filled with real narratives, however these don't relate to the big stories of world history and maybe, as Meuwissen argues, these cities avoid producing these historic self representations for the sake of an inner peace

And in fact the low intensity of a second rate city like Kassel has qualities in its own right. Kassel exhibits these qualities of low intensity in an exemplary way. You can find a parking spot wherever you go. It is a city with suburban qualities but a city nonetheless. You never worry that you won't get a place in your favorite restaurant. And if you go to the premier outdoor cafe on a beautiful Sunday afternoon then there is still a table available - and a parking spot for your car if you need one.

**Daan** and **Job Roggeveen** show in a photo essay **“Claiming Space”** how in Liege/Luik, Belgium the low pressure of a 2nd rate city allows for a rich culture of appropriation strategies – at least when it comes to parking.

But in an increasingly connected world the economic realities are precarious for most 2nd rate cities. In the competition for jobs and an ever expanding tax base, 2nd rate cities are in a squeeze between the suburbs where land is even cheaper and even more accessible by car on the one side, and the real attractive 1st rate urban areas that draw the highly educated and the creative on the other side. And since planning ‘down’ to a suburb is not an option that is considered by most cities, the fight for the survival of 2nd rate cities is to attract more urban assets. **Beatriz Ramo** presents one such **Urban Shopping List** for European second-rate cities. According to the US-based urbanist Richard Florida the latest ‘must have’ for a city is a creative class. In the information economy attracting those who work in the creative sectors is the key to economic success and growth. However as **Jamie Peck** in his article **“Banal Urbanism – Cities and the Creativity Fix”** argues, this strategy is just another way in which cities compete for an inherently mobile resource – the creatives can at any time pack up and move to the next happening place. Plus the causal story is far from solid, the cities investing in their hip factor as a development strategy might well be chasing a chimera. But in the process they neglect those neighborhoods and people that truly would need support. The creativity fix as the business park of the new century.

Second-rate cities are much more vulnerable to adversarial politics and ideologies that promote suburbanization instead of development of successful cities. Unlike cities of global format like New York or Tokyo, they cannot create enough of an independent urban dynamic that buffers them against anti-urban politics. **Michael J. Thompson** traces the long history of an ideology that feeds much of these politics. **Antiurbanism** – an ideology that demonizes urban life. For some concrete examples of how these anti-urban politics can be directly reflected in concrete practices look at **Alex Schafran’s Unofficial Guide to 2nd Rate Urbanism**.

This is just a small selection of the many fascinating contributions in this issue. We thank everyone that contributed to this issue of monu. Especially we want to thank Martin Luce and Gregor Harbusch who generously hosted us to the open editorial office at the documenta 12 in Kassel.

The Editors  
August 2007  
Bernd Upmeyer and Thomas Soehl

\* The documenta happens every 5 years for 100 days. The two shows previous to this one documenta X in 1997 and documenta 11 in 2002.  
\*\* We both were Students at the Architecture and Urban Planning department of the local University for 5 years.

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